THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • MONDAY • DECEMBER 28, 2020 • ₹7.00 • PAGES 32 • LATE CITY EDITION

READ SHARE FOLLOW
newindianexpress.com
facebook.com/thenewindianexpress twitter.com/newindianexpress
instagram.com/newindianexpress

ANT TOLD TO RETURN TO ITS ROOTS IN PAYMENTS SERVICES

People's Bank of China stops short of asking for a breakup of Jack Ma's firm, but stresses necessity of a business overhaul

WEIGHING OPTIONS TO PROTECT ECONOMY

The central bank told Ant to 'rectify' its suite of services, which have expanded from a PayPal-like operation to offer consumer loans, insurance and wealth management. The regulators are weighing the options of carving up Ant's different lines of operation, or splitting its online and offline services to contain the risks it poses to the Chinese economy P9

SLAMMED FOR MONOPOLISTIC TENDENCIES

- Authorities blasted Ant for sub-par corporate governance, disdain toward regulatory requirements, and engaging in regulatory arbitrage. They castigated Ant for monopolistic tendencies too
- The empires built by Jack Ma, Tencent Holdings' chairman Ma Huateng and other tycoons are also under scrutiny

$35 bn

IPO LISTING OF ANT BEFORE THE CENTRAL BANK TORPEDOED IT

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

19 variants of coronavirus already in India, but no cause for alarm

Findings come at a time when the govt has decided to speed up genome sequencing

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @New Delhi

LIKE elsewhere, coronavirus is quietly changing in India, making itself resistant to antibodies. As of now, 19 such variants are already present in the country, researchers associated with multiple government institutions have established.

Scientists attached with the CSIR - Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology in Delhi, the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research and Kurnool Medical College, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh, analysed over 2,40,000 SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences from 133 countries and identified 86 with escape mutants, or variants with genetic changes that make them resistant to antibodies. Nineteen of these 86 variants were found in India.

An escape mutation is one that allows SARS-CoV-2 to evade antibodies specific to the spike protein the virus uses to enter human cells. All vaccines are designed to generate antibodies against the spike protein to try to block the virus' entry into cells.

The findings come at a time when the government has decided to accelerate genome sequencing to track changes in the pathogen after a variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the UK had significant structural and behavioural changes, making it 70% more infectious that the original Covid strain.

"There is no need to be alarmed, but definitely a need to be cautious," Vinod Scaria, a scientist with CSIR-IGIB and joint first author of the paper told this newspaper. "The variations in the virus does not mean that the vaccine will not work against it but is likely to lower its efficacy," he said. "During the trials of the vaccine, too, it needs to be analysed whether those who are getting infected are afflicted with the variant virus," he added.

Scaria said cases of Covid-19 re-infection should also be followed up with genome sequencing.

WAKING UP TO EXPEDITE GENOME SEQUENCING

Of the more than 1.01 crore Covid-19 positive cases reported in India, only about 6,400 samples have been genome sequenced. In contrast, the UK with 2 million cases has already sequenced 1.57 lakh samples

TAC recommends more stringent guidelines

The state's TAC has recommended stringent guidelines on tackling the new strain of SARS-CoV-2, following a meeting of the National Task Force on Covid-19 on Saturday. P3

Experts bat for genomic sequencing surveillance

AJITH M S & RANJANI MADHAVAN @Mysuru/Bengaluru

WHILE the emergence of a new strain of the infectious Covid-19 virus in the UK has triggered concern worldwide, experts here are cautioning against any laxity in studying the virus and are calling for genomic sequencing surveillance across the country, or at least at the state level. They feel that sequencing surveillance will help in containing the virus by isolating only the source, instead of locking down entire cities, states or the country itself, yet again.

Genomics scientist Dr Vinod Scaria of CSIR- Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, said there has never been a continuous and systematic effort in the country to understand the virus, except for sequencing activities that were confined to samples from certain groups or states. CONTINUED ON: P3

As we head into the New Year, **TNIE** brings you curated articles on what 2020 meant for our lives. The first of the series:

DO WE NEED OTHERS?

2020 YEAR TO REMEMBER FORGET

SUNDAR SARUKKAI

THE Covid pandemic is a disease of its time. For a world which was already becoming more individualistic, here was a virus that made us more isolated. This isolation was driven not by choice but by a fear of others. The pandemic and its consequences made us confront a new phenomenon about the way our society is evolving, particularly on the changing nature of how we relate to other people.

Years pass away like people do. They are there at one moment and then not there the next. But this year did not just pass away. It stayed on and on. For a long period, it was the same day, day after day. We began to recognise the habitual acts that describe our everyday life. Habits, like breathing, are such that we are rarely conscious of them. 2020 was the year in which habits came to the foreground, in which we had to confront our daily habits every day.

In this year, particularly from March, our lives underwent many changes. People travelled much less. Many worked from home and countless others suffered because their work did not allow them this luxury. Across the country, in urban and rural areas, people saw less of others than they had ever done before. They did not visit the homes of relatives and friends as they used to do earlier. The crowds in public spaces, restaurants, places of worship, festivals and sporting events just vanished.

We had lots more time to spend by ourselves, within ourselves. For some, if not many, it was a kind of rediscovery of who we are as individuals. But more importantly, it was also a discovery of how little other people matter to our lives. Not only did people not meet others but they spoke and interacted much less with others. It was not that we were more lonely but only that we discovered new forms of being alone.

Society was already changing before the pandemic struck. Social processes were becoming more centred towards the individual. Swiggy changed the basic social act of eating with others. Instead of sharing common spaces and interacting with the people in hotels and restaurants, Swiggy made it possible to eat on demand, eat by ourselves and where and when we wanted.

Personal technologies had changed our social interactions. Children spent more time lost inside their phones, tabs and the internet. Not only did they spend little time talking to their family but they also had less face-to-face interactions with their friends. Friendship was mediated through Facebook and other creations of a digital media.

All these changes were magnified by our response to the pandemic. They were legitimised by the changing practices during this period. After 2020, it would not be a surprise if online transacting and interacting with others becomes a new habit of the individual as well as of the larger society.

Many find it easier to relate to people through this digital world. This is not surprising since it is indeed difficult interacting with people in person. It is much easier to engage with others through Skype and Zoom. You don't have to listen to everything they say. You can watch something else while they are talking, read emails or listen to music – practices that many schoolchildren excelled in during online classes! Emotion gets dispersed and dissipated in the online medium compared to face-to-face interaction.

The online medium became the de facto society for those who could afford it. This was not just an urban phenomenon. People across the country tuned into YouTube and other digital platforms for entertainment as well as for learning cooking, music and everything else. The internet also served as a de facto hospital for them as they learnt more about the coronavirus than even some doctors. But this learning was impersonal because the internet functions as an impersonal society, one which replaced the physical structures of social practices and social behaviour.

CONTINUED ON: P4

IPS officers' tiff over Safe City tender heats up

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE spat between the two IPS officers over the tender process in the ₹619 crore Bengaluru Safe City Project seems to be getting uglier. On Sunday, IPS officer Hemant Nimbalkar claimed that the tender process was transparent, amid allegations of irregularities.

Hitting back at Nimbalkar again, Home Secretary D Roopa alleged that he had given wrong facts, misleading the government, the media and public.

Nimbalkar, Bengaluru Additional Commissioner of Police (Administration) and also chairman of the tender inviting committee, said he had written to the Chief Secretary on December 7 informing him that someone had impersonated the Home Secretary and tried to access classified information pertaining to the preparation of RFP (Request For Proposal) and details of tenders. P5

WITH THIS ISSUE
THE ESSENTIAL CAMPUS DIGEST edex
32 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF edex (TABLOID), 4 OF CITY EXPRESS

VOTING AT THE GRASSROOTS

Polling began at 7 am and ended at 5 pm across 20,728 booths

Polling for the first phase was held on December 22; counting for both phases is scheduled for December 30

1,05,431 candidates were in the fray for 39,378 seats, while 3,697 have already been elected unopposed

Voting in second phase, according to SEC data: 80.71%

80,000 security personnel were deployed

BENGALURU URBAN recorded the lowest figure with only 67.68% of the voters casting their ballot

BENGALURU RURAL recorded the highest percentage of 91.86%, followed by Chikkaballapur at 89.58%. Ramanagara came third with 88.27%

• FULL COVERAGE P24

AIADMK says no to coalition govt in TN

T MURUGANANDHAM @Chennai

IN a razor-sharp message that was loud and clear to its allies, the AIADMK on Sunday categorically ruled out any possibility of a coalition after the 2021 Assembly elections, asserting that the new government will be led only by the ruling Dravidian party.

Mincing no words during his rather explosive speech, the AIADMK's deputy coordinator, KP Munusamy, said, "The AIADMK will form the next government even if national and state parties join as alliance partners. There is no need to speak about a coalition government. If any party coming forward for an alliance arrangement, aspires to form a coalition government, please rethink." He also reaffirmed that Edappadi K Palaniswami is the chief ministerial candidate of the alliance. Though he did not mention any party, his remarks were a straight response to the BJP, which has been speaking about sharing power.

Addressing a gathering after CM Palaniswami and his deputy, O Panneerselvam, formally kick-started the AIADMK campaign in Chennai, Munusamy said forming a government on their own has been the long-standing policy of late leaders MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa. "It is the firm stand of all the functionaries and the cadre, including Palaniswami and Panneerselvam."

Munusamy's remarks come two days after Union minister Prakash Javadekar had evaded reporters' questions about the BJP leadership endorsing Palaniswami as the CM candidate. P5

Nitish Kumar makes loyalist head of Bihar JDU

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @Patna

A day after the opposition predicted copycat defections would rock the JDU further, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar resigned as the national president of the party on Sunday and appointed his political confidant and ex-IAS officer Ram Chandra Prasad Singh Singh as the successor for the next three years.

Dismissing the opposition claims that Arunachal Pradesh-like defections posed a threat to the party, JDU chief general secretary K C Tyagi said that Nitish handed over the reins to RCP Singh to play a bigger role in national politics. While maintaining that the alliance with BJP was under no strain, Tyagi said that Nitish will campaign vigorously in West Bengal, where the party will contest alone.

However, sources said the JDU was worried about an Arunachal rerun in Bihar, with speculation that Singh's elevation was tied to it.

Singh is Nitish's trouble shooter and is credited with bringing JD(U) back in the NDA fold in 2017. His elevation is seen as attempt to stem turbulence in the JDU outside Bihar as it frees up Nitish to work towards strengthening the party in other states. Singh is known to be somewhat soft towards the BJP in NDA circles here.

A bureaucrat-turned-politician, Singh has been the vice-president (organisation) of party, and its Rajya Sabha MP.

EXPRESS READ

Rajinikanth's health improves, discharged

Hyderabad: Superstar Rajinikanth was on Sunday discharged from a hospital here, where he was treated for blood pressure fluctuation, after his condition improved, authorities said. The 70-year-old actor was admitted to the hospital here on December 25 with severe hypertension and exhaustion, it said | P5

MANN KI BAAT

PM's 'atmanirbharta' pitch: K'taka youths in focus

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mysuru/Udupi

IT was double delight for Karnataka on Sunday when Prime Minister Narendra Modi quoted two instances to highlight the dedication and perseverance of youths in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' address on Sunday.

The PM, who stressed on 'Atmanirbharta' during difficult times, spoke about the work of the Yuva Brigade, a group of youngsters, who took up the task of renovating the dilapidated Lord Veerabhadreshwara temple at Ganjam near Srirangapatna last month during their free time. For those with a can-do approach and a will-do spirit, nothing can be far, he stressed.

The Yuva Brigade at work on the temple at Ganjam near Srirangapatna | EXPRESS

For Chandrashekhar and the other young volunteers, it was a weekend as usual with their latest initiative of cleaning the bathing ghats of Kapila river near Mysuru on Sunday. They were surprised when they started getting calls from friends, informing them about the PM making mention of their work.

The youths, who are all employed full-time, have been engaged in renovating and cleaning several temples and Kalyanis (step wells) during their free time. An elated Chandrashekhar said that they did not expect their efforts to be recognised by the PM himself. "Last week, we got several calls from a person seeking details about our work in Ganjam. We never thought it was for this," he said. The recognition has lifted their spirits and they plan to take up more such initiatives, he said. P5

An unbeaten 104 from Ajinkya Rahane (left) helped India take 82-run lead on Day Two of the second Test against Australia at the MCG on Sunday | AP

MELBOURNE IDENTITY

India take lead @ MCG

At 63-3, India were in a spot of bother. But in Ajinkya Rahane, India found a saviour. The stand-in captain, coming in at No 4, scored a patient century, his 12th in Tests, as India ended Day 2 with a lead of 82 runs with five wickets still remaining. Rahane and Ravindra Jadeja have so far added 104 runs for the sixth wicket which has put Australia on the backfoot at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

104*

is Rahane's second Tests century at the MCG. He had scored 147 in 2015. Only three other Asians — Vinod Mankad, Sadiq Md, Majid Khan have scored two hundreds at this venue.

1 THIS IS RAHANE'S FIRST TEST CENTURY BATTING AT NO 4, AND ALSO HIS FIRST AS CAPTAIN.

2nd Indian captain after Sachin Tendulkar (1999) to score a hundred at Melbourne.